

CALL FOR JOINT ACTION

Civil Society Organizations in Ethiopia Demand Accelerated Actions Against the Dehumanization of Migrant Domestic workers in the Gulf states NOW!

Date: Thursday, September 17, 2020

We, the participants of the weekly COVID and Gender - Civil Society Organizations, a virtual Consultation convening since the outbreak of the pandemic exploring the Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality and Women's Emancipation, acknowledge our unique position and collective power in advancing gender equality and protecting the human rights of girls and women.

ACKNOWLEDGE the Ethiopian government's effort to combat the COVID-19 pandemic by adopting containment measures such as state of emergency, social distancing, partial lockdowns, curfews, the closure of schools, the prohibition of public gatherings, establishment of food banks etc.

Recognize that the unexpected arrival of thousands of returnees to Ethiopia exacerbates the challenge in the country's effort to control coronavirus pandemic, and we appreciate the effort so far taken by the government of Ethiopia to bring thousands of citizens back home from countries like Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Somalia and Lebanon. We welcome the government's efforts to work in partnership with different non-governmental organizations (NGOs) towards the reintegration of returnees.

OBSERVE that the pandemic has added to existing structural inequalities deepening social inequity, straining the countries' fragile health infrastructure, intensifying economic and humanitarian threat, including the Hundreds of Ethiopian domestic workers who are returning home from Lebanon every day and the hundreds or

thousands more which are expected to arrive in the coming weeks. While it is not clear what would happen to those who are already home, thousands of other Ethiopian women are still hanging in limbo. Ethiopians are the biggest community (estimated to be over 200,000) in Lebanon's domestic workers population and hit hard the most. Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA) recently announced that over 19,000 Ethiopians have returned home from countries across the region and the Middle-East following the impacts of COVID-19. Most of the returnees from Lebanon have self-financed their cost of return, according to the Ethiopian Consulate in Beirut.

Three months ago, Saudi Arabia was threatening to expel 12,000 Ethiopians living in the country with no travel document. Many more are [relinquishing](#) in jails in horrendous conditions.

DEEPLY CONCERNED that Ethiopian migrant domestic workers are [stranded](#) in Lebanon in [atrocious](#) conditions due to COVID-19 flight bans, facing extreme rates of physical and sexual abuses, and murder, where some are reportedly committing suicide because of their traumatic experiences. Several are sleeping on the rough streets of Beirut after being abandoned by their employers who claim they no longer wish to pay the workers. The country's worsening economic crises and coronavirus pandemic related measures are complicating the life of the poor migrant workers who came to Lebanon to earn money to send back home. Left with no alternatives, some stay with their employers working for free. Many others fled their employer's house after being abused verbally, physically, or sexually or being dumped on the streets with no money, no passport, no travel document to go back to their home countries hence compounding on the institutional discrimination migrant domestic workers are subjected to.

OBSERVE that the pandemic has added to the existing structural injustices creating a far deeper social, economic and humanitarian threat, including the extraordinary risk women employed in Gulf states face. Prior to the tragic explosion of Beirut's port, IMF and other global institutions were forecasting that Lebanon's crumbling economy will

continue to shrink. Inflation is expected to stay in three digits, unemployment and poverty also expected to climb to 35% and 50 % respectively, according to the Institute of International Finance (IIF). Considering the projections, it would not be difficult to predict more and more employers would want to get rid of their migrant workers. Lebanon's currency constantly losing its value against the US dollar means even those who managed to hold their passport would struggle to pay for plane ticket. Lebanon's labor laws do not apply to the domestic workers. Foreigners have been exploited in Lebanon for decades because of the [Kafala](#) (Sponsorship system), that denies migrant workers basic human right to freedom of movement. It gives the employer the authority to withhold the worker's passport, and thereby restrict their ability to leave the country as well.

APPLAUDE the work of Non-governmental organizations, whom in the absence of government action, stepped in to support the domestic workers in Lebanon. They assisted domestic workers buying air tickets for those who wish to repatriate, delivered food, clothes, and sanitation necessities.

RECOMMIT ourselves to strengthen our capacity to mainstream a gendered lens to all COVID-19 response by forgoing long-term partnerships and collaborations with the government, regional agencies, women led movements, Media, faith based institutions, the UN agencies, regional economic community, feminist movements and the private sector et al.

We, the Civil Society Organizations, are extremely concerned by alarming reports from Ethiopian migrant workers in Arab states.

In view of the above dire situation that Ethiopian migrants in some of the Middle East countries, are found in, we ask for the following actions to be taken by the different relevant actors.

URGE the Ethiopian Government to take the following measures:

1. Establish measures and provide resources to protect migrants' women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, and also financing the shelters for domestic gender-based violence and migrant returnees
2. Ensure continued implementation of gender commitments in COVID-19 responses to rebuild the economies of migrant returnees;
3. Commitment on financial inclusion through disaster management budgets, as well as future economic stimulus measures in the continuing COVID-19 context, and future planning should consider a gendered approach centering the most marginalized like those left alone in the Gulf States.
4. Strengthen effective coordination between various actors working on migration.
5. Identify and assist the undocumented citizens to have temporary travel documents, and exert its maximum effort to make the repatriation process quicker
6. Work across the consulate in Beirut and other Middle East countries to ensure that basic human right of Ethiopian citizens are respected.
7. Launch proper investigation on the reported abuse, violence, death, and suicide
8. Seek to influence Middle East countries in bilateral negotiations on the abolishment of the Kafala system, protection and promotion of labor rights including the introduction of minimum wage, weekly day off and working hour limit. Qatar recently abolished this exploitive system and there are recent reports indicating Lebanon took moves to reform the sponsorship.
9. The state Media should give adequate attention to the domestic workers related issues in the Middle East and raise the matter responsibly to stimulate a more effective response.
10. Take action on exploitive recruitment agencies in the country and human trafficking
11. Work with the diplomatic representations to set up additional standard emergency shelters at the consulates and other places including mainstreaming Covid-19 prevention and response measures

12. Work with NGOs and different actors engaged in similar issues, to support and facilitate the return process and reintegration and rehabilitation of returnees.

We are **calling on the UN agencies to:** -

1. Support the migrants in dire situation and facilitate their return.
2. Critically examine **moratorium** on deportations put in place by the **UN** to ensure that the initial intention of the moratorium regarding protection of workers isn't being used against the protection of the rights and wellbeing of workers. Hence, we call for the reassessment of the moratorium from a human rights perspective. .

We are **calling on international & local civil society organizations to:** -

1. Assist the government of Ethiopia in the process of repatriation (financially and technically)
2. Come together in mobilizing resources for those who are in need of food, plane ticket, medical support and shelter facility in Beirut and other places.
3. Provide comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration assistance to returnees.
4. Strengthen and accelerate advocacy and alliance for the abolishment of the Kafala system

We are **calling on the private sector:** -

1. Local and multinational companies should make financial and in-kind contribution for the humanitarian efforts.
2. Provide trainings and create decent work and livelihood opportunities to the returnees who have relevant skills for employment

List of CSOs and Networks

1. ActionAid Ethiopia
2. Addis Ababa Women's Association (AAWA)
3. ANNPCAN – Ethiopia
4. CARE Ethiopia
5. Center for Accelerated Women's Economic Empowerment (CAWEE- Ethiopia)
6. Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Association (CCRDA)
7. Christian Aid
8. Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organizations – (CEHRO)
9. Civil Society Support Programme Phase Two (CSSP2)
10. CVT Ethiopia
11. Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE - Ethiopia)
12. Emmanuel Development Association (EDA)
13. Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations Forum (ECSF)
14. Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA)
15. Ethiopian Women with Disability National Association (EWDNA)
16. Family Service Association (FSA)
17. Gambella Women's Association
18. GOAL
19. Good Samaritan Association (GSA)
20. LIVE-ADDIS
21. Medical Collaboration Committee (CCM)
22. Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA)
23. Network of Networks of HIV Positive
24. New Millennium Hope Development Organization (NMHDO)
25. Organization for Girls Adults Advocacy (OGAA)
26. Orphans and Girls Assistance Association (OGAA)
27. Oxfam
28. PACT Ethiopia
29. Professional Alliance for Development (PADet)
30. PELUM Ethiopia
31. PHE Ethiopia Consortium (PHEEC)
32. Plan International ETHIOPIA
33. Redeem the Generation
34. Rift valley children and women Development organization (RCWDO)
35. Siddhartha Development Ethiopia
36. Siiqee Women's Development Association
37. Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA Network)
38. TIMRAN
39. The Lutheran World Federation
40. Union of Ethiopian Women Charitable Association (UEWCA)
41. Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)
42. Women Can Do It (WCDI)
43. Young Women's Christian Association in Ethiopia (YWCA - Ethiopia)



For more information, please contact *Abiy Wendifraw* (+ 251912738573) newaethiopia@gmail.com
 Tel.: +251 11 821 7758 (Office)